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THE NATURE AND USE OF BEAUTY.

CHAPTER V.

CONFIRMATION OF THE THEORY OF THE DIVINITY OF BEAUTY.

VICTOR COUSIN is, it seems to us, entitled to be considered the first of the rigidly rational expositors of the nature of Beauty; yet either, in him, sensation was not sufficiently strong and clear, or he, like most philosophers of that school, has too strong a penchant for the purely rational processes of investigation. He admits a value to sensation, it is true, and a certain efficiency to intuition; indeed, so far as their theoretical value is concerned, we could find no fault with his position; while he yet ignores the mystics, because they prefer those faculties to ratiocination, which feebly follows and confirms them only. Thus he says, justly enough, "Reflection is a process more or less tardy in the individual and in the race. It is *par excellence*, the philosophic faculty; it sometimes engenders doubt and skepticism, sometimes convictions, that for being rational, are only the more profound. It constructs systems, it creates artificial logic, and all those formulas which we now use by the force of habit, as if they were natural to us. But spontaneous intuition is the true logic of nature. It presides over the acquisition of nearly all our cognitions. Children, the people, three-fourths of the human race, never pass beyond it, and rest there with boundless security." Yet, while throughout his philosophy, he insists on tracing all ideas back to their first principles, and distinctly affirms that God is the principle of principles; he says, with the most absolute misunderstanding of what he terms mysticism—"Mysticism pretends to elevate man directly to God, and does not see that in depriving reason of its power, it really deprives him of that which makes him know God, and puts him in a just communication with God by the intermediary of eternal and infinite truth." Now, in order to understand fully M. Cousin's philosophy, to accept its truth and make its errors discover their opposed truths, it is necessary to cut down to the root of this matter of knowledge. We admit with him, and claim from those who do not already admit it, the distinctive

functions of Reason and Intuition; but there is no distinction in *knowledge*—that is the same whether the subject of the former or the latter. But Reason only acts when we know something on which it may act; it compares, weighs, and makes logical, a series of truths already discovered by Intuition. But if it be true that knowledge is only elevated and essentially valuable when it attains to the comprehension of principles, and, as Cousin says, "God is the principle of principles," the mind can only rest in knowing Him, and is only philosophical when it refers to Him as the cause of the truth which it has possessed. But since Intuition always precedes Reason, it follows that it alone can grasp the idea of God, which Reason can never attain fully, just as the rudder of a ship must follow its prow into port—one must precede and the other necessarily remain a certain distance behind; and the great distinction between philosophers will always be, that one class urges the Reason forward to keep pace with their perception of truth, caring less for the *completeness* of their demonstrations than for the reach of their thought; while the other, moving more mathematically, and perhaps more safely, will restrain their quick-winged intuitions to the heavy laboring motions of Reason, considering discovery worthless unless it be followed up by a rational proof of its accuracy. To this latter class belongs M. Cousin, and herein lies his objection to those whom he terms mystics (who are in reality those whose intuitions are keener than his, and to whom are evident certain truths which lie beyond his sphere of thought)—that they "pretend to elevate man directly to God," since they go one step further in the research of principles than he dares, they insisting that the mind may progress even to the absolute perception of Deity as the principle of principles; and that since Spirit must be essentially the same in all its manifestations, the spirit of man may take cognizance of the Spirit of God without the intervention of matter, which is the medium of His communication to the material sense only. Cousin insists on an "intermediary," which, lying between Spirit and matter, must be less elevated than Spirit, and more elevated than matter—what can it be? He calls it "eter-

nal and infinite truth," implying thereby that truth has a substantial medium of manifestation which is not Spirit nor yet matter, but by which we, who are material beings, become cognizant of Deity, who is a spiritual being, and beyond which we cannot go. It can only be a more refined quality of matter, and the legitimate deduction from M. Cousin's teaching is, that we are purely material, and therefore incapable of that unity with God which is necessary to the perception and full comprehension of Him. The mystics, by discarding this intermediary, take the position that there are but two forms of existence—matter and spirit, and that by our material natures we take cognizance of the former, and by our spiritual natures, of the latter, and that the being in material form does not necessitate the abnegation of any spiritual faculty: that, therefore, we may be elevated to a sphere in which it is possible to perceive God—or to be in communication with Him, and this communication is nothing more nor less than what we term intuition, which every human being has in different degree. Children, as purest and nearest to Him, have the keenest intuition, a truth to which Wordsworth's ode to immortality is a better witness than all the philosophies ever written—

"Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory, do we come
From God, who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing Boy,
But he beholds the light, and whence it flows,
He sees it in his joy;
The Youth who further from the East
Must travel, still is Nature's priest,
And by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended;
At length the Man perceives it die away,
And fade into the light of common day."

We do not propose to follow out the differences between Cousin and the mystics further than to show, from what we have already said, that in thus misapprehending the nature of Humanity and its cognitions, he has also vitiated the analogies by which alone we can learn Deity; and by materializing us, as he has, he has destroyed our likeness to Him, and thus lost the only ground from which Beauty can be examined. Incapable of analyzing himself accurately, he has also failed in his analysis of God,

as will be seen in the final statement of his theory. "Thus, on all sides, on that of metaphysics, on that of æsthetics, especially on that of ethics, we elevate ourselves to the same principle, the common centre, the last foundation of all truth, all beauty, all goodness. The true, the beautiful, and the good, are only different revelations of the same being." But let us consider these three "different revelations" closely—the three distinct attributes into which he resolves God. Goodness is the divine Love, an essence, the inner nature of Deity, the origin of all existence, and its motive—Truth is the divine Wisdom, also an essence, and the director and organizer of existence, the cause of its system—but Beauty—it is something which we see, a quality of form, an appearance, and not at all an essence—the two former are causes, the latter is a result; and thus M. Cousin's three principles are reduced to two—the Supreme Love and the Supreme Wisdom; and of these, or of one of these, Beauty is the visible effect. It is surely needless to say that, built on such a final analysis of the elements of cognition, M. Cousin's system of philosophy must fall to the ground like a tripod from which one foot is taken. The foundation of his error we have pointed out above, in showing that he discards the essentially spiritual nature of Humanity, committing the very error of which he accuses the mystics in the following passage:—"Mysticism breaks in some sort the ladder that elevates us to infinite substance; it regards this substance alone, independently of the truth that manifests it, and it imagines itself to possess also the pure absolute, pure unity, being in itself. The advantage which mysticism here seeks, is to give to thought an object wherein there is no mixture, no division, no multiplicity, wherein every sensible and human element has entirely disappeared. But in order to obtain this advantage, it must pay the cost of it. It is a very simple means of freeing theodicea from every shade of anthropomorphism; it is reducing God to an abstraction, to the abstraction of being in itself. Being in itself, it is true, is free from all division, but upon the condition that it have no attribute, no quality, and even that it be deprived of knowledge and intelligence; for intelligence, if elevated as it might be, always supposes the distinction between the intelligent subject and the intelligible object. A God from whom absolute unity excludes intelligence is the God of the mystic philosophy."

Now we believe M. Cousin to have gone through the very process of reduction which he ascribes to the mystics. He assumes that man is, as compared with Deity, a material being, *i. e.*, a being in

matter, since he is incapable of comprehending Deity, who is "being in itself" (*i. e.*, pure spirit not in any way depending on matter for existence), without the intervention of some intermediary between matter and spirit, which he calls "eternal and infinite truth," and which is the form, not of God, but of this hypothetical intermediary. God then must be formless, incomprehensible, of a nature of being entirely removed from that of ours, and to the elevation of which we can never attain; in other words, He is to us an abstraction—a principle which must descend into an intermediary to be understood by us, which must put on a form, having none of its own. But this is not the God whose children we are—not the God of Religion and prayer. Mysticism maintains, on the one hand, that nothing exists or can exist, that has not a form proper to itself—that form is a necessary condition of existence; and on the other that all Spirit is essentially the same, and that man, being a spirit in his essential existence, is capable of being elevated to the perception of God in his proper form, and of that measure of union with him, which the perfect knowledge of Him implies; and that, therefore, no intermediary can exist. This is the psychology of Christ's teaching—the philosophy of all revealed religion; and they who deny this to Christianity leave no distinction between it and Platonism. One of those forms which mysticism demands in the Divine existence is Beauty, and now we may see the reason of M. Cousin's error in making it one of an essentially equal trinity with Truth and Goodness, since he made the three to be only principles intermediate between God and human intelligence, but Truth and Goodness we have found are God himself, being Wisdom and Love in action; while Beauty is one of the two great forms in which He appears to us. The pages of the Scriptures abound with indications of this relation. "Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." Psalms, xxix. 2. "He appointed singers unto the Lord and that should praise the beauty of holiness as they went out before the army." II Chronicles, xx. 21. "Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined." Ps. i. 2. "And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us." Ps. xc. 17. "And thy renown went forth among the heathen for thy beauty; for it was perfect through my comeliness which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord God." Ezekiel, xvi. 14. "How great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty!" Zechariah, ix. 17.

The difficulty with the Gallic philosopher is, that he is, rationally, a materialist,

and this, perhaps, without suspecting it, because, even while admitting the existence of Deity, and even his intelligence, he has, by placing him on a plane above the possible cognition of mankind, so that we could only know him through the intermediary which we have discussed, made him a severe abstraction, and confined our investigations and interest to the material existence. It was impossible, from such a point of view, to arrive at the first cause of Beauty, which cause is purely spiritual, and thus out of his range. When, therefore, he had reached the farthest verge of his field of perception, he lost himself in the search for his intermediary, and not daring to follow his intuitions into the unknown and trackless abyss before him; seeing the beautiful, and knowing that the good and the true were there, he could no further distinguish between the effect—which Beauty is, and the cause—which Goodness is, and classed them altogether. Yet, in a note to the lecture on Mysticism, M. Cousin says, "The human mind may form to itself an abstract and general idea of being, but this idea has no real object in nature. All being is determinate if it is real; and to be determinate is to possess certain modes of being, transitory and accidental, or constant and essential. Knowledge of being in itself is then not merely interdicted to the human mind; it is contrary to the nature of things. At the other extreme of metaphysics is a powerless psychology, which, by fear of a hollow ontology, is condemned to voluntary ignorance. We are not able, say these philosophers—Mr. Dugald Stewart, for example, to attain-being in itself; it is permitted us to know only phenomena and qualities; so that, in order not to wander in search of the substance of the soul, they do not dare affirm its spirituality, and devote themselves to the study of its different faculties. Equal error, equal chimera! There are no more qualities without being than being without qualities. No being is without its determinations, and reciprocally its determinations are not without it. To consider the determinations of beings, independently of the being that possessed them, is no longer to observe; it is to abstract, to make an abstraction quite as extravagant as that of being considered independently of its qualities." Here, in the first place, Cousin has admitted too much, in saying that "the human mind may form to itself an abstract and general idea of being," for even that is impossible. If we have an idea, it is an idea of *something*, and that something has a substance, of which our minds take cognizance, and this substance, the subject of our cognitions, has always a form; so that "abstract

ideas" are no ideas at all, and this should have been M. Cousin's position, for the ideas which he admits are those of which we have not yet clearly perceived the form—indeterminate, not in reality, but in our vision only—from mystery, not from formlessness. Therefore, when he condemns Mr. Dugald Stewart, for abstracting the determinations (or forms) of being as equally absurd with those who regard "being considered independently of its qualities," he condemns himself also, since he himself, in dividing God from Wisdom and Love, and making Him a principle lying behind those, considers being independently of its qualities, for God is not the cause of Wisdom and Love, but Wisdom itself and Love itself; but He *is* the cause of Beauty. Cousin was baffled in his search for the origin of Beauty, because he did not comprehend God—did not know what the "mystics" whom he despised so much, and especially Swedenborg, their chief, would have taught him. He would have learned from them that the spirit of Man is not only *capable* of unity with God, but that that unity is its normal state, and that He is in us and we in Him (if he had not learned that from Christ before), and that thence we have our wisdom and our goodness—that there is no bar between spirit and Spirit; and that all the beauty of humanity is only the fainter radiance of the Divine Beauty which, taking its habitation in us, shines through the earthen vessels of our materiality.

We will not follow the analysis of Cousin's philosophy further: if he failed at the last step before reaching the grand secret, he has said many things which show that his course was towards that position which we have assumed as the true theory of the beautiful. To have said, as he does, that "God, being the principle of all things, must for this reason be that of perfect beauty," were not much more than others have said, but he goes even further than his pronounced theory, in saying what we now quote: "Moral beauty comprises two distinct elements, equally but diversely beautiful—justice and charity,* respect and love of men. He who expresses in his conduct justice and charity accomplishes the most beautiful of all works; the good man is, in his way, the greatest of all artists. But what shall we say of him who is the very substance of justice and the exhaustless source of love? If our moral nature is beautiful, what must be the beauty of its author * * * Let us contem-

plate nature with the eye of the soul as well as with the eye of the body—everywhere a moral expression will strike us, and the form of things will impress us as symbols of thought. We have said that with man, and with the animal even, the figure is beautiful on account of the expression. But when you are on the summit of the Alps, or before the immense Ocean, when you behold the rising or setting of the sun at the beginning or the close of the day, do not these imposing pictures produce on you a moral effect? Do all these grand spectacles appear only for the sake of appearing? Do not we regard them as manifestations of an admirable power, intelligence, and wisdom? And, thus to speak, is not the face of nature expressive like that of a man?

"Form cannot be simply a form, it must be the form of something. Physical beauty is, then, the sign of an internal beauty, which is spiritual and moral beauty; and this is the foundation, the principle, the unity of the beautiful.

"All the beauties that we have just enumerated and reduced compose what is called the really beautiful. But above real beauty is a beauty of another order—ideal beauty * * * The ideal continually recedes as we approach it. Its last termination is in the infinite, that is to say in God; or, to speak more correctly, the true and absolute ideal is nothing more than God himself.

* * * * *

"Thus God is the principle of the three orders of beauty that we have distinguished—physical beauty, intellectual beauty, moral beauty.

"In Him also are reunited the two great forms of the beautiful distributed in each of these two orders, to wit—the beautiful and the sublime. God is *par excellence* the beautiful; for what object satisfies more all our faculties, our reason, our imagination, and our heart! He offers to reason the highest idea, beyond which it has nothing more to seek; to imagination the most ravishing contemplation; to the heart a sovereign object of love. He is, then, perfectly beautiful; but is he not sublime also in other ways? If He extends the horizon of thought, it is to confound it in the abyss of his greatness. If the soul blooms at the spectacle of his goodness, has it not also reason to be affrighted at the idea of his justice, which is not less present to it? * * * Yes, God is for us at once the type and source of the two great forms of beauty, because He is to us at once an impenetrable enigma, and still the clearest word that we are able to find for all enigmas."

M. Cousin has only attained to vague ideas of the source of the beautiful, and

for this we feel that there must be a deeper cause than the imperfections of his ratiocination—a cause indicated and confirmed by an appendix to the lectures from which we have quoted, on French Art, in which he says, in a comparison between Raphael and Poussin (Nicolo), "No doubt Raphael elevates the soul—whatever is beautiful cannot fail to do that; but he touches only the surface, *circum præcordia ludit*; he penetrates not deep; moves not the inner fibres of our being: for why? he himself was not so moved. He snatches us from earth, and transports us into the serene atmosphere of eternal beauty; but the mournful side of life, the sublime emotions of the heart, magnanimity, heroism, in a word, moral grandeur, this he does not express; * * * Poussin belongs to a very different world * * * Like Corneille he is grave and masculine; he has the sentiment of the great, and strives to reach it. If, above everything, he is an artist, if his long career is an assiduous and indefatigable study of Beauty, it is preëminently moral beauty that strikes him; and when he represents historic or Christian scenes, one feels he is then like the author of the Cid of Cinna, and of Polycuete, in his natural element; * * * it is on the moral ground that he has a place exalted and apart in the history of Art."

One wonders, after reading that appendix, rather that he should have said any truth of the beautiful rather than have fallen short so much, and if he had ever experienced any pure sensations of Beauty. To analyze Beauty closely, one must have a perception of it, fine to the nicest shades of distinction, and at the same time so clear and full, that in the mental contemplation of it, he may not feel that it is a vague, indeterminate quality, but a particular and defined appearance; for since sensation is the basis of all investigation, it must be full and satisfactory, or the investigation can never be satisfactory. A mind which has that sensation perfect, however, may dispense with the power of reasoning to a great extent, and by its glorious fullness of perception of Beauty, pass, by intuitive logic, from it to its cause—it being in fact to such a mind a simple problem of cause and effect—a sensation being received, to comprehend at once its origin. This, we believe, we shall find in our examination of Ruskin's Theory of Beauty.

UGLY OBJECTS.—Constable remarked to a lady, who, looking at an engraving of a house, called it an ugly thing, "No, madam, there is nothing ugly; *I never saw an ugly thing in my life*: for, let the form of an object be as it may—light, shade, and perfection will always make it beautiful. It is perspective which improves the form of this."

* There is an utter confusion in the theory of our author in the distinction between the sublime and beautiful, which he sometimes, as in this passage, considers as one, and sometimes divides. We shall consider this distinction when we come to treat of the Sublime, and shall then recur to Cousin again.